

Checklist for visiting schools for Children and Young People with special educational needs and disabilities.

To enable you to make a decision about your child's schooling you might want to visit a number of schools to ensure that you are properly informed before you express any preference. Each school will have different arrangements for parents/carers to visit the school and you should contact the school initially.

It will be essential that the visit is arranged in advance and at a time which will be convenient for both you and the school.

You might like to consider the points below to help you get the most from your visit. They are only suggestions, and it is important that you add any other questions or points that you think are particularly relevant, or important, for you and your child. It may be a good idea to write down the questions you want answered and take them with you. Also make sure that you have enough time available and that you are given enough time in school to look around and ask questions.

Before you visit a school

- Read the school's online information very carefully, e.g., SEN information, SEN policy, and think about what the school will need to do for your child and how they can help you.
- Think about what you would like to find out, the questions to ask and the people you would like to meet.

Visiting the school

- Arrange the visit at a time when children will be in the school.
- Try to spend enough time in the school to allow you to make an informed decision.
- First impressions are important, but you should base any decision on a range of responses, experiences and the information you gather.

- Arrange an initial visit to the school without your child - you can always return with your child later.
- You may want to visit the school with a friend or relative with whom you can discuss important issues later on.
- Think about how your child will travel to and from the school.
- Consider the actual travelling time involved and the daily arrangements you will need to make.
- Try, if possible, to meet the staff who could be involved with your child - the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) is a good person to start with.
- The person showing you around is there to help and will be pleased to answer your questions. You may wish to make another appointment to talk further with the headteacher or to discuss your child with the staff, especially if you feel that there are queries you still need to clarify. You may be able to do this over the telephone or may be by email.

In the classroom

- It may be helpful to explore:
- how the structure and timetable of the day and the teaching and learning in class will meet your child's needs
- how the individual needs of children are met throughout the school day, e.g., lunch and breaks.
- whether there are particular areas of expertise/provision in school, e.g., social communication groups, literacy support, Circle of Friends
- what arrangements there are for you, as a parent, to discuss your child's progress and contribute to target setting and planning, learning opportunities, including homework.
- whether your child would have to miss the same lessons or subjects to regularly work with any visiting professionals.

The school in general

- It may be helpful to explore:
- any special adaptations and equipment your child may need?
- whether any extra activities are available after school

- whether there are opportunities to meet with parents of other children at school, perhaps through organised meetings, e.g., PTA.
- whether you will have to provide anything for your child, e.g., uniform/stationery or if you will be asked to contribute towards the cost of anything else, e.g., books, organised trips, extra equipment.
- the range and condition of equipment/resources in classrooms, workshops
- what the ICT (information and communication technology) facilities are like
- ask the school what their expectations are of their children and parents.
- it may be helpful to explore the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Do they match your expectations of your child?
- if the school is a special school, does it have links with other schools? If so, what opportunities does this provide for children?
- if the school is a mainstream school are there opportunities to access outreach support from a special school?

School atmosphere - overall impressions

- does the school feel welcoming?
- try to imagine whether your child would be happy in the school.
- do children seem well behaved/happy?
- if there is anything you do not understand or are not happy with don't be afraid to ask or speak about it there and then.

After the visit

- discuss your thoughts and feelings about the school with the person you went with, or with your partner, a relative or friend.
- telephone or visit the school again if you want more information, perhaps with your child this time.
- if your child has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or is undergoing an EHC needs assessment, please feedback your views to the SEN Caseworker based at the Children's Services Department as soon as possible.
- it is important that you are happy with the educational arrangements for your child and that you are confident that the school can meet your child's needs.

Residential schools

Additional points to think about and questions to ask:

- find out what links there will be between the school and you, such as home visits or letters/emails.
- find out how and when you will be contacted about your child's progress.
- find out how and when you will be contacted if there is a problem.
- ask if it would be possible for you to contact other parents of children at the school.
- arrange to meet the person who will be responsible for the overall care of your child out of school hours.
- visit the dormitory or bedroom your child will use.
- what privacy will your child have?
- will your child know who to go to if they are worried or have a problem?
- what arrangements are there for your child to telephone home or receive telephone calls?
- what arrangements are there if a child needs attention or is ill during the night?
- what are the bathroom facilities and routines?
- what arrangements are there for medical care?
- what opportunities will there be for your child to join out of school activities, for example Brownies, Cubs, Guides, Scouts and youth groups?
- will your child get the same opportunities to shop, cook, clean and play as he or she would at home?
- if it is proposed that your child remains at school over the weekend, what would be the range and programme of activities?
- it is important that you are happy with the residential arrangements for your child and that you are confident that the school can meet your child's needs.

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